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AUTHOR Jackson, Shirley A.
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ABSTRACT

The Comprehensive Approach to Restructuring a School was designed as a framework for improving the academic achievement and reducing the dropout rate of poor African American students. The major elements of the Comprehensive Approach are as follows: (1) leadership must have vision and commitment; (2) communication processes, developed by a school-based restructuring team, are essential for success; (3) the planning phase must develop goals, expected outcomes, and priorities based on a needs assessment, must codify these into a program design, and must then identify and allocate resources; (4) the restructuring team must closely monitor the implementation of the program design; (5) the monitoring, assessment, and accountability aspects of the program design must go on continuously, based on a planned program of statistical data and information gathering; and (6) teaching must be based on the preferred learning styles of African American children. The following implications for classroom teaching are outlined: (1) the curriculum must be activity-based; (2) the creative arts are prime activities for developing concepts and skills; (3) one-to-one tutoring, small groups, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning are very successful; (4) personal contact with the teacher and the subject is important; (5) teaching must take into account that African American perceptual modalities tend to be developmentally multisensory; and (6) student confidence must be encouraged with explanations, demonstrations, assistance, and assurances. A point-by-point comparison between the preferred learning styles of the Comprehensive Approach and "low-yield" teaching styles are included. Six transparency charts of statistical data and a list of 35 references are appended. (FMW)

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ACCELERATING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR POOR BLACK STUDENTS: TRANSFORMING THE TEACHING-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND BEHAVIORS TO ACCOMODATE THE PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

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Dr. Shirley A. Jackson

Associate Commissioner for Dissemination Policy

U.S. Department of Education

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National Center for Education Statistics

555 New Jersey Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20208

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I have an ambitious agenda for this time we have together. I have so much I would like to share with you, and yet I feel like the Hodga. [Hodga Story] Like the Hodga's people, I imagine some of you know what I'm going to say and some of you don't. However, I will talk with you about three things. First, I will congratulate you on the accelerated academic achievement in the basic skills of your African American students, documented through the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Next, I will share with you a comprehensive framework for restructuring a school that I developed, because it is time to get serious about transforming our schools and tinkering around the edges will not do it. Finally, I will identify the documented preferred learning styles of poor African American children and challenge you to target your school improvement/restructuring efforts on transforming the teaching-learning environment to accomodate the preferred learning styles of your students, using the Comprehensive Approach to Restructuring a School.

Accelerated Academic Achievement

The good news is that transforming ineffective schools attended by poor African American students into effective ones, is not a mission impossible, although it does remain a dream deferred for the majority of those students. The good news is that accelerating the academic achievement of poor African American

students in the area of basic skills and reducing their dropout rate is a mission accomplished, but celebrate while you get back to work on it. Because although these students have basic level skills, they, like other American students show low achievement in the area of higher order thinking skills and science achievement--the key areas where the future will be won or lost by them and by America. The following charts will graphically reveal what I mean. (See Appendix for transparency charts and selected references.)

1. Transparency Chart #1- Dropout rates for African American students have fallen dramatically, and high school completion rates have risen dramatically.

   o The dropout rate for African American students fell from 9.2 percent in 1963 to 6.7 percent in 1987, the most rapid fall for all racial/ethnic groups. (The dropout rate here is the proportion of students who dropout in a single year without completing high school.)

   o The high school completion rates of African American students at ages 25 to 29, those taking a longer time to obtain their high school diplomas or GEDs, show a dramatic increase. High school completion rates for this group went from about 50 percent in 1965 to approximately 83 percent in 1987; only 3 percentage points below whites.

2. Transparency Chart #2- African American students have made dramatic and significant progress in reading achievement, especially 17-year-olds and 13-year-olds.

   o Although the gap between African American and white

reading achievement has not been completely closed, 17-year-old African American students decreased the gap from a 60 point gap in 1971 to a 20 point gap in 1988.

o Almost all African American 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds have Basic Level skills, meaning they can understand specific or sequentially relate information.

o Most African American 13-year-olds and practically all of the 17-year-olds have Intermediate Level skills, meaning they can search for specific information, interrelate ideas, and make generalizations.

o Only about 5 percent of <u>all</u> students possess the highest level of reading skills, the Advanced Level, and African Americans students are represented in that small, elite group.

3. Transparency Charts # 3A and 3B- African American students have continuously narrowed the mathematics achievement gap between themselves and white students. Seventeen-year-old African American students decreased the gap from about a 40 point gap in 1973 to about a 29 point gap in 1986. They have also continued to narrow the gap in other curricula areas.

4. Transparency Chart # 4- African American students increased their SAT averages more than any other racial/ethnic group from 1976 to 1990. Their SAT Verbal average rose from 332 in 1976 to 352 in 1990, a 20 point gain; their SAT Mathematics average rose from 354 points in 1976 to 385 points in 1990, a 31 point gain.

5. Transparency Chart # 5- Although African American students have dramatically and significantly decreased their dropout rates and

increased their academic achievement in the basic skills, their rate of enrollment in higher education has decreased.

In summary, while achievement levels have increased dramatically for African Americans, narrowing the gap between them and their white peers, the dropout rates and academic achievement scores remain well below those of white students at all age levels. Moreover, the academic achievement of white students has been stagnant over a 15-20 year period and America students have performed poorly in international comparisons on science and math.

Comprehensive Framework for Restructuring a School

America is busy reforming and restructuring its public schools. Earlier reform efforts did not address the needs of poor African American students. The jury is still out on whether the restructuring movement will yield meaningful changes for the majority of these students since, upon close inspection, the focus seems to be on organizing for shared decisionmaking. Although shared decision making is a worthwhile goal (Jackson, 1981), its achievement will mean absolutely nothing unless the newly constituted group quickly turns its attention to transforming what and how students learn and teachers teach (David 1989, p.3.)

However, transforming what and how students learn and teachers teach must be done in a comprehensive, systematic, and systemic way. The Comprehensive Approach to Restructuring A School can provide the framework for accomplishing this task. There is more here than I can go into now, so I'll summarize quickly.

(Refer: Framework Chart on page 5)

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Comprehensive Framework for Restructuring a School

The most basic of the Major Elements necessary for restructuring a school is LEADERSHIP WITH VISION AND COMMITMENT. The school's leadership, must be able to cultivate the development and acceptance of a shared vision that graphically describes, "What do we want our students and our school to be"? "What do we want our students to learn and how can we best teach them?" "Exactly what does an optimum teaching-learning environment with behaviors to accomodate the preferred learning styles of our children look like?" Broad-based commitment to making the vision a reality must be secured from the various sectors of the school community with a vested interest in the education of the students; policymakers, staff, parents, community, and the students.

Effective COMMUNICATION PROCESSES are at the core of a successful school restructuring effort. Ways and means must be devised to keep various sectors of the school community feeling involved in and informed about the restructuring efforts.

A key feature of the communication process is a school-based restructuring team that is representative of the varied stakeholders in the school community. The composition of the team should include teachers, administrators, parents, students, and those from the community that can supply resources for reinforcement and enrichment, as well as good ideas. This might include volunteers, churches, community organizations, business and industry, higher education, cultural institutions, and social service agencies.

Communications processes should be worked out by the team for the three key processes necessary to a comprehensive approach to restructuring a school; planning, implementation, and monitoring, assessment, and accountability. In addition to guiding the planning, implementation, and monitoring, assessment and accountability elements, a key part of the team's responsibilities should include keeping the part of the community that they represent informed of progress, and soliciting and sharing their constituency's input on and support for key decisions.

PLANNING

In the PLANNING phase, the school-based restructuring team should conduct a needs assessment to determine where the school is in relationship to the shared vision in the areas of school philosophy and ethos, school and classroom organization, staffing, curriculum and instruction, resources for reinforcement and enrichment, and parent involvement.

Based on a discrepancy analysis of the vision and current status (the needs assessment results), goals, expected outcomes, and priorities should be identified to move the school from the reality to the vision within the specified areas and priorities. Research, successful models, and common wisdom on what seems to work in making schools effective and as effective teaching strategies should be studied. Especially those that I will mention shortly as having a track record for transforming the teaching-learning environment and behaviors to accomodate the preferred

learning styles of African American children. Decisions on the goals, expected outcomes, and priorities, based on the team's studies and deliberations, should be codified in a program design. The program design should state the shared vision, needs assessment results, priorities, and for each goal and expected outcome, exactly what will be done in the areas of school philosophy and ethos, school and classroom organization, staffing, curriculum and instruction, reinforcement and enrichment resources, and parent involvement. All major activities/events should be identified, along with the person responsible for it and a timeline. The program design should also indicate the specific monitoring, assessment, and accountability plan.

It is extremely important to secure broad-based support for the program design as the appropriate way of realizing the shared-vision. Town-hall meetings on the drafts may prove a useful vehicle for this purpose. Staff development focusing on mastery of the content of the curriculum and on what the new teaching behaviors should be, with time to practice them and plan in teams for classroom implementation, can not be over emphasized.

Resource sources and allocation should be identified prior to starting the implementation of the program design. Should resources not be available to fund the entire program design, priorities may have to be more severely drawn and the program design implemented in phases as more resources become available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The school-based restructuring team should carefully guide the implementation of the agreed on program design, meeting regularly to monitor the activities/events and timelines and to assess the implementation and communication processes. Areas for close monitoring should include movement towards the vision/goals/design of the school philosophy and ethos, school and classroom organization, staffing, curriculum and instruction, reinforcement and enrichment resources, and parent involvement.

MONITORING, ASSESSMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The monitoring, assessment, and accountability aspects of the program design, implementation and communication processes, and student achievement must go on continuously. However, to determine the actual achievement of goals, specific, predetermined tools for gathering such data/information should be administered as scheduled.

Are the teachers practicing the new behaviors every day and with what results on student motivation, attitudes, and achievement? What changes are needed in the program design? What happens to those teachers who chose not to or appear unable to successfully implement the program design after staff development (inservice, peer coaching, etc.)? This is where the rubber hits the road! Nothing can be reformed, restructured, or transformed successfully unless the teaching-learning environment and behaviors are changed.

Transforming the Teaching-Learning Environment and Behaviors to Accomodate the Preferred Learning Styles of African American Children

Schools must provide a competitive education for African American children. A competitive education produces students who are excited about and enjoy learning and school because they are successful and see the relevance and connection between success in school, success in their everyday lives, and success in their futures. A competitive education teaches African American students the concepts, knowledge, and skills that prepare them to effectively compete and live comfortably and cooperatively as contributing citizens in the new technological world, on Earth or in space. A competitive education empowers African American students by teaching them to analyze, compare, evaluate, communicate, defend, invent, create; to use knowledge to analyze issues, make decisions, and solve problems--not to become "living trivia libraries". (Worsham 1988)

The basis for transforming schools that poor African American students attend into schools that provide competitive educations must be the identification and use of the teaching-learning environments and behaviors that will result in success for all of the students, not some small preselected "stars". This must involve determining what must be taught, examining the preferred learning styles of these students to determine the best methods for teaching them, and then consistently/persistently utilizing learning environments, methodologies, and organizations most successful in ensuring that all of these students will succeed.

Curriculum, instruction, and materials used must reflect the learning styles that research and effective practices have identified as particularly effective for poor African American students. It is clear that most of these students do not respond well to the traditional ways that classes are conducted for them--lots of uninspired, unspirited, untargeted, unmotivating, independent assignments, written on the chalkboard to copy or on "purple monsters" for the students "to do". "Read pages 1-10 and answer questions 1-5 on the board/worksheets, after you look up/write the definitions to the 25 words", as the major teaching strategy is totally ineffective and incongruent with their preferred learning styles. Therefore, poor African American students can be expected not to respond positively to mounds of "purple monster" independent seatwork, most of which are isolated assignments without themes, reinforcement value, and most of which students see as the "busy work" that it often is (Anderson 1982, Banks 1987, Cohen 1987, Dunn 1978, Gilbert & Gay 1985, Goodlad & Oakes 1988, and National Alliance of Black School Educators 1984).

Hale-Benson (1986) points out that our schools are designed to accomodate the European cultural background and learning styles. African American students' backgrounds and perspectives often lead to distinctive learning style differences, or expressive preferences, that when taken into consideration, positively affect instructional outcomes. What are the cultural

differences that must be considered if teachers are to succeed? An extensive review of urban education research/literature, reports and conference papers was conducted to find the answer to this question. Elements designating the preferred learning styles were extracted and a frequency analysis conducted to determine the common core elements of the preferred learning styles and corresponding low-yield teaching styles. The findings were reviewed by selected urban educators for their content validity. The following comparison of "Poor African American Students: Preferred Learning Styles and Low-Yield Teaching Styles" is primarily based on the works of Akbar (1975), Beane (1985), Berliner, et al (1978), Brophy & Good (1986), Cohen (1969), Denbo (1986), Dunn & Dunn (1978), Gilbert & Gay (1985), Hale-Benson (1986), Hilliard (1976), Oakes (1985), Rist (1970, 1972), and Slavin (1988).

POOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: PREFERRED LEARNING AND LOW-YIELD TEACHING STYLES

PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES	LOW-YIELD TEACHING STYLES
AFFECTIVE FACTORS	
1. PEOPLE-CENTERED TEACHERS & INSTRUCTION	1. OBJECT-CENTERED TEACHERS & INSTRUCTION
Attitudes and Emotions	
-Prefers "feeling"/ emotion-based instructional presentations/activities where the presenter is obviously in-	-Prefers emotionally uninvolved, controlled, impersonal, matter-of-fact presentations/activities.

volved in the subject/activity. Likes to discuss how s/he "feels" about things and what s/he would do in similar situations. Values more affective, expressive responses	Usually does not encourage or accept student's feelings as legitimate responses; values more cognitive, logical/cerebral responses
-Especially sensitive and responsive to how the teacher "feels about", "perceives" the student, and reacts inkind. "Reads" nonverbal communications--attitudes shown through body language--accurately at a very early age	-Focuses on "work" assigned, not on perceptions of students. Believes it's relatively unimportant how they "feel about" students, as long as they do their jobs
-Cooperates out of a sense of loyalty, personal affinity & feelings; highly empathetic; leans towards altruism	-Cooperates out of a sense of duty, respect for hierarchical command and position
-Keen sense of justice, quick to analyze & perceive injustice & unfairness and respond inkind	-Sense of justice and fairness from the teacher's perspective
-Responds to appropriate physical contact--friendly touches (little hugs, pats on back, calming hand on shoulder, physical proximity/ closeness. Confrontational--verbally and physically aggressively oriented	-Prefers physical distance, little or no physical contact/touching; avoidance of all manner of direct confrontation

Persistence and Perceived Utility

-Responds positively to frequent constructive feedback (especially deserved compliments & public praise for "good" performance), or correct information provided to an incorrect response in a kind manner

-Gives feedback primarily by marking what is wrong on papers submitted and graded. Often does not react or comment after student's oral response

-Easily distracted during static activities requiring long periods of sedentary, solitary activities that student finds it difficult to understand or relate to

-Prefers hard to distract student, able to concentrate and work long periods of time on assigned work, whether they are able to see its value now or not

-Self-centered; self descriptions tend to point to student's perceived essence; events result from specific causality

-Other-centered; descriptions tend to point to functions, perceived status role and relationship to significant others; events result from multiple causality

-Wants to see relationship between what is being taught, experiences, & what student perceives s/he will need to know & be able to use

-Wants students to learn what is presented now and perhaps later they will understand its value to them

-Prefers student-centered curricular activities based on student's own perceived needs, background experiences, sense of the relevance of the subject/ concepts/content,

-Prefers subject-centered curricular/activities based on teacher's perception of what student needs to know, with little attempt to communicate why to the student or

diagnosed level of knowledge & skills	to assess student's prior knowledge and/or readiness to learn the selected skills/subject content/concept; little attempt to integrate the personal knowledge of the student into the lessons
-Needs to be guided in the transfer of knowledge, skills & information learned	-Assumes automatic transfer by students of the knowledge, skills, information presented to new situations

COGNITIVE FACTORS

Instructional Practices

-Prefers direct instruction involving intense teacher-student interaction, especially in the initial phases; humanistic orientation	-Prefers assigning students to work independently with objects--textbooks, worksheets, workbooks, programmed instruction, hardware/gadgets--from initial instruction through mastery; mechanical orientation
-Prefers animated instructional activities where planned, purposeful movement is a part of the learning activity; such as, role-playing, creative drama, "calling back" answers (Baptist preacher style).	-Prefers unanimated instructional activities where students are able to complete assignments independently, primarily through reading and writing

discussions

-Prefers sociocentric, democratic learning arrangements and groups; preferring to work in hetergeneous groups--dyads, cooperative peer-groups, cross-age groups--especially during the initial stages of learning in guided and independent practice, and for follow-up projects.

-Prefers flexibility, fluid learning schedule, with time allowed to pursue student initiated questions & activities of relevance & interest to the student about the subject

-Impressed by variation, what is unique, different, creative, novel, improvised. Sameness viewed as boring, oppressive, freedom of expression valued; adapts rapidly to novel stimuli & spontaneity

2. GESTALT STYLE OF TEACHING/LEARNING

-Prefers global, holistic

-Prefers hierarchical, egocentric learning arrangements; preferring students operate individually, non-interactively, competitively, or in homogeneous ability groups. Cooperative or team work viewed as students "cheating"; heterogeneous grouping viewed as difficult for teacher to plan for and execute, and as holding "good students" back

-Prefers rigid order, strict scheduling of activities with little deviation from planned questions or activities, or time to pursue topics in depth/collary subjects that may be of interest only to students

-Impressed by what is perceived as standard, normal, usual, regular, preconceived. Differences viewed with suspicion and as deficiencies; following the rules valued

2. ANALYTICAL STYLE OF TEACHING/LEARNING

-Prefers atomistic, analytical

instruction--seeing the big picture first, then the discrete parts--emphasis on the whole & the interdependence of the parts

-Prefers integrated, coordinated, interdisciplinary, thematically-organized content/information/instruction; memory for essence

-Prefers divergent thinking, moving from a common point (main idea, theme, generalization, principle) to branches or parts; inferential, deductive reasoning, intuitive; thinking tends to be circular & patterened rather than linear

-Prefers direct extraction of meaning--meaning oriented; meanings are evolving & contextual; focus on descriptive characteristics; extracted properties have special functional or personal relevance to student, nonobvious attributes are ignored

-Prefers intuitive, psychological approach to problem-solving; seeks &

teaching--dealing with the discrete building blocks first; the parts are eventually supposed to add up to the big picture

-Prefers teaching isolated, compartmentalized, discrete subjects at different, scheduled, distinct times; memory for specific, discrete facts and bits of knowledge

-Prefers convergent thinking, approaching the same point from different directions that move towards a common conclusion, result, generalization/principle; inductive reasoning, thinking tends to be linear

-Prefers indirect extraction of meaning--signs and symbols orientated; meanings are universal; focus on nonobvious attributes; names extracted properties and gives them meaning in themselves

-Prefers conscious, logical approach to problem-solving; seeks and uses

uses subjective instincts and internal cues for problem-solving; relationships noticed tend to be functional	only objective data for problem-solving
-Comfortable with approximates in space, numbers & time, such as being present "close to" appointed starting times	-Comfortable with accuracy and precision in space, numbers, and time; such as being exactly on time
-Prefers language style dependent upon unique context and upon many interactional characteristics of the communicants on time & place, on vocal intonation and inflection, muscular movements, and other nonverbal cues; fluent, strong, colorful, descriptive, rhymthic expressions in communications	-Prefers Standard English language with formal and stable rules of organization; language that depends upon long-lasting and stable meaning of words; communications intended to be understood in themselves--without dependence upon nonverbal cues or idiosyncratic sentences
-Prefers communal/group, aural-oral modality of enjoying and expressing creative language activities	-Prefers individual, visual-kinesthetic/reading-writing,modality of enjoying and expressing language activities
-Comfortable and proficient in nonverbal commmunications; body language and nuances of intonation are significant aspects of communication and "reading" others	-Word/language dependent

meaning

-Prefers memorization of long passages of "poetic-type", highly stylized, colorful, creative, high-interest information (such as found in "the dozens","signifying", "woofing", "rapping", "slang", words to popular songs), with accompanying interjections and body language/movements

-Prefers memorization of isolated, discrete facts (dates, situations, places, people, etc.), recited in matter-of-fact manner

-Process/style important (not what you do but how you do it)

-Outcomes/products most important (bottom line result is only thing that counts)

-Prefers performance based assessments as basis of tests for mastery (writing samples, work folders, etc.) rather than abstract pencil & paper styled assessments

-Prefers pencil and paper, cognitive based assessment for mastery, rather than performance based assessments

<u>What Are the Implications of the Preferred Learning Styles to Transforming Instruction/Teaching Styles for Poor African American Students?</u>

The culture and preferred learning styles of poor African American students must be understood, respected, and reflected by those who would be successful teachers of these students. African American and other minority children must feel accepted by their teachers and a sense of pride in their ethnic cultures and contributions to the positive development of the world, America and their

people's progress. Since teachers can't teach what they don't know, there are obvious staff development and instructional implications, which include:

1. African American children tend to be more physically active than white children--they should not be summarily medicated nor put into EMH classes since this is a natural attribute, especially in young males. This means that curriculum must be activity-based/hands on/learning-by-doing oriented and classes must be organized to provide more planned activity and movement, especially in the early and middle grades;

2. African American children enjoy expressing themselves through physical movement, oral and creative, rhyming language forms-- drama, storytelling, music, art, and rhythm. This means the creative arts, creative drama, story-telling, discussions and creative projects are prime activities for developing concepts and skills for these students;

3. African American children tend to be intuitive and feeling-based, preferring touching/tactile, high-intensity, interpersonal experiences with people to distant, object-based learning experiences. This is why one-to-one tutoring, small groups, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning groups are so much more successful as modes of organization/grouping for these students;

4. African American children's sensory preferences tend to be experiential, manipulative and interactive: their motivation-mode, personal contact that links the student, teacher, and subject to success and positive recognition;

5. African American children's perceptual modalities preferences tend to be developmentally multisensory--tactile (feeling/hands-on experience), auditory (hearing/explaining), oral (discussion/clarifiying), visual (demonstration/reading), and kinesthetic (writing/doing); and,

6. African American children's on-task persistence will tend to be off-task

unless they have adequate "start-up", explanations, demonstrations, assistance when needed, and assurances of "you can do it" by the teacher. They can and should/must be moved into operating with more independence and persistance and less structure, and they will, with guidance, when they feel confident and secure with the teacher, tasks, and environment.

Other recommendations include:

1. Structure the curriculum around content and concepts rather than discrete or process skills.

2. Structure the content and concepts thematically using an integrated, interdisciplinary approach.

3. Teach process skills, reading and writing skills, and thinking/problem-solving/decision making skills with a focus on content/concepts. Since process skills have no content of their own and processes are invariant, content should be selected and taught with the main focus being on the content's power to provide opportunities to teach critical thinking skills.

4. Select learning activities that will be fun to do/learn and provide multiple modalities for learning (listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking-creating, conceptualizing, "learning-by-doing/hands-on", physical/tactillle/kinesthetic, etc. modalities.
Use heterogeneous peer/cooperative/interactive groupings.

5. Ensure that all students are provided enough and varied opportunities to learn the content/concepts/skills until they demonstrate mastery.

6. Design assessment tools so that "actual" learning objectives, leaning activities, and learning assessment tools cover the same content/concepts/skills. It is also extremely effective if the format of the learning/practice activities and the assessment activities/items are the same in format. Don't assume transfer!

Successful restructuring efforts must focus on transforming the academic achievement of African American students. The focal point of the transformation must be on the teacher-student interaction in the classroom, based on the preferred learning styles of the students and what we know about effective instruction/teaching practices and environments. (Transparency Chart #6) But most of all teachers must accept the creative differences that students may use in responding to learning experiences and facilitate students in hooking their own experiences up with what they are learning.